



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 88th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

A Massive Attack on Reading

SPEECH

OF

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IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, April 6, 1964

Mr. FOGARTY. Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that a comprehensive assault on reading is needed to develop the most valuable tool that education can offer—reading. It must not be a minor effort, handled by amateurs, if we are to have any hope of success. In the following speech I have outlined a proposed approach which I believe is both practical and possible. I am sure that many of my colleagues will want to help in the job of developing literate human beings who can effectively participate in our society—to elevate literacy upon which our democracy depends.

Following is an address which I delivered before the Conference on Reading for Educators, at the University of Delaware, Newark, Del., March 7, 1964:

ADDRESS OF CONGRESSMAN JOHN E. FOGARTY,
OF RHODE ISLAND

I welcome this opportunity to meet with the men and women who are providing professional leadership for developing literate individuals in our society. You share with your colleagues throughout the Nation a heavy responsibility. In this era of great change, new demands of both quality and quantity are being placed upon American education. Today, as perhaps never before, there is no higher calling than that of the educator. It is to you and to our schools that the Nation looks for the structure and shape of our future.

As masters of reading skills you face a special challenge of inspiring and stimulating both teachers and students to the full attainment of their potentials. Those among you who are serving our elementary schools provide the foundations upon which the whole house of education rests.

I would like to talk with you today about a job begun—and a job yet to be done in

American education. This job is to develop literate human beings who can effectively participate in our society—to elevate literacy upon which our democracy depends. You, as the experts, must provide the leadership for undertaking this task; I, as a Representative in Congress, wish to seek ways to help you.

My appearance before you today reminds me of a classroom tale which was recently related to me:

An extremely nearsighted schoolteacher was rapidly losing his temper, because many of his students apparently neglected their lesson. "You at the back of the class—what was the date of the signing of the Magna Carta?"

"I don't know."

"Well then, can you tell me what the Gordon Riots were?"

"I don't know."

"I assigned that yesterday. What were you doing last night?"

"I was out drinking beer with some friends."

The schoolteacher gasped, and his face went almost purple. "You have the audacity to stand there and tell me that. How do you expect to pass your examination?"

"Well, I don't. I'm an electrician, and I just came here to fix the lights."

Like the electrician, I may be ill prepared to answer specific inquiries. But perhaps, like him, I can help to repair the lights, to cast illumination on a subject that concerns us all. This is the role the Federal Government can play in helping to solve the problems related to reading and literacy.

Historically, the Federal Government has been an active participant in research and development activity in a variety of fields. Modern agriculture, of course, is deeply indebted to Government research aid for many of its present-day accomplishments. Governmental research and development was greatly accelerated during and after the second World War and with astounding success—especially in the medical, physical, and space sciences. Now, governmental leaders are beginning to look at the educational, sociological, and economic problems of our society in a similar way. People in Washington are asking what the Federal Govern-

ment can do to translate sensible ideas in these fields into sound and effective action.

Your vital and continuing interest in the development of literate individuals has bridged the progress accomplished since the days of the Hornbook and the McGuffey readers to the acute need for progress that lies ahead. Popular publications reflect the complexity of your task in the controversial aspects of reading.

Can Johnny read or can't he? we are asked. Is he a better or poorer reader than his forefathers? Should teachers use a "look-say" method, a phonics method, or some combination of both? I continually encounter words and phrases like "phonics," "phonetics," "phonemics," "the augmented Roman alphabet," "the Bloomfield-Barnhart approach," and so forth. If there is some confusion in the public mind, perhaps this is understandable. There is, I hear, some question among the specialists themselves over the best phonics approach—and how to use it and when to use it.

Now what can the Federal Government contribute toward solving this sort of problem? What is its proper and effective role? One example of a federally supported program which brought significant changes to our high schools was the physics program of the Physical Science Study Committee. For this program, the National Science Foundation provided funds which enabled an outstanding group of physicists and educators to focus their attention upon high school physics. After materials were developed by this group, teachers were trained to use them in workshops and institutes around the country. The total cost of this venture was approximately \$14 million. The net result—is that this program is currently being used by nearly 75 percent of all students receiving high school physics instruction in the United States. In a brief span of years, the teaching of physics was brought up to date, up to the potentials of modern knowledge and teaching skills and student capability.

Although there is at present no undertaking of this magnitude in reading, some notable accomplishments are underway. One of my congressional committee responsibilities brings me in close contact with the

cooperative research program of the Office of Education. This program has provided funds for a number of basic and applied research undertakings pertaining to reading. For example:

One researcher is studying the effectiveness of beginning the formal teaching of reading in kindergarten. Although some educators have argued for years that many children can be taught to read at earlier ages than they are now taught, no research has been conducted either to prove or disprove it. The results of this study could be of great significance to reading instruction.

The structure of children's language was compared with the language used in textbooks in another study. The researcher found that the oral language children use is far more advanced than the language of the books in which they are taught to read.

In a third study the language growth of children is being studied over the span of the elementary school years and through junior and senior high school. A longitudinal study of language development such as this has never been conducted before and will give us for the first time a picture of how language and reading skills grow.

In a fourth study, the investigator is attempting to determine what communication barriers exist for the culturally deprived. He will then attempt to develop ways to evaluate these differences.

A fifth study has focused upon the problem of teaching illiterate adolescents how to read. If this researcher succeeds, he may contribute materially to reducing the number of students who drop out of school. And, he may well provide some vital clues to attacking the overarching problem of adult illiteracy.

A sixth group has undertaken an exploratory study of reading patterns among high school students. These researchers seek to determine whether specified training in reading will result in significantly better reading ability within various technical areas.

In addition to these six exploratory studies, the cooperative research program is also supporting 11 curriculum study centers within the framework of its Project English. Since the purpose of these centers is to develop curricular materials, the impact of reading upon each center's activity is of immediate concern. One of the centers, for

example, is developing reading and language materials and teaching guides which will be used in junior high schools serving children from poor and culturally disadvantaged areas. Emphasis has been placed here because educators have found that available materials are usually unsuccessful with these children. Another center supported through Project English has as a major objective the development of a series of films on methods of teaching reading in the secondary schools. These films will be used in the training of teachers.

These studies, in which many of you are involved, form a firm basis for advancing our knowledge about reading. As many of us know, plans for further studies next year are also impressive. The Office of Education intends, first, to support a number of field tests of first-grade reading programs in various parts of the country; second, to establish a study group which will investigate needed basic research in reading; and, third, to relate activities in reading to current developments within the various behavioral and biological sciences. Each of these efforts is directed toward an evident problem in reading.

These are the types of studies in reading which are being or have been supported by Federal funds. They also typify the kinds of projects which receive support from private foundations or colleges and universities.

At this point, it would be well to evaluate the nature and extent of the research now underway in reading, to ask whether the present decentralized attack on reading problems is accomplishing enough, whether our current research ventures in reading are of sufficient magnitude to bring about desired and widespread improvement.

In weighing these questions, in finding a perspective on the magnitude of the task, we may recall that the National Science Foundation spent about \$14 million on a coordinated program to develop and strengthen the teaching of physics in high school. This effort was vastly successful. But we might also reflect that physics is often neither a required course nor even a course offered in many high schools, that many students have no contact with it whatever.

In teaching our children to read, however, we are speaking of a central enterprise of education, involving every child who attends our schools. We are speaking of the need to open doors to the written word,

to develop what is surely the most valuable tool that education can offer.

The need to expand our reading skills, to elevate America's literacy is so comprehensive that I cannot imagine how the present research, worthwhile as it may be, can possibly be enough. As one who was involved in the development of our present high level of medical research, I am compelled to say that the educational community needs to initiate a comprehensive assault on reading, that such an effort abundantly calls for support and that the time for this effort and support is now.

It cannot and must not be a minor effort, handled by amateurs if we are to have any hope of success. The best minds in our Nation should be brought to bear upon it. It presents, in my judgment, a classic opportunity for schools, colleges, universities, publishers, and Federal agencies to join together in a project aimed at developing literacy as expeditiously and as effectively as our resources will permit.

Five or ten years ago, few people would have considered a Federal agency as a source of funds for such a project. Today, it would be eligible for funds from several Federal sources. The Cooperative Research Branch of the Office of Education, as one example, might well place its staff and resources behind a massive research approach to reading. But, however it is supported, research on reading cannot move ahead without expert leadership. You and your colleagues must provide that leadership.

Is our meeting today a proper place to set a project of this importance into motion? If it isn't, where shall we find a more likely place?

Now, what might result from the massive study which I have outlined? Generally, I would hope for a highly literate populace in the years ahead. Specifically, I would hope that as our young people become adults they will be equipped to share responsibility in the democratic process, trained to critically analyze issues in today's complex, fast-moving world, and prepared to take a proud part within the business and professional and cultural spheres of our society.

Are these goals beyond reach of our Nation, a nation which is about to put a man on the moon?

I think not. I think that our opportunity is now at hand to construct the sturdiest of foundations for American education, and that this is the time and the place to begin.